

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 HA-05 OMB-01 TRSE-00 AID-05 CIAE-00

PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15

ICA-11 NSCE-00 SSO-00 ICAE-00 INRE-00 /074 W

-----090160 032311Z /70

O R 032225Z APR 78

FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 163

INFO AMEMBASSY LIMA

AMEMBASSY QUITO

AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

DIA WASHDC

USCINCO J2 QUARRY HEIGHTS CZ

C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 2674

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, BL

SUBJ: BOLIVIAN MILITARY PONDERES WHETHER TO PROCEED WITH
JULY ELECTIONS

REF: LA PAZ 2606

1. SUMMARY: A MEETING OF ABOUT 100 MILITARY
UNIT COMMANDERS BEGAN IN LA PAZ ON APRIL 3, TO
DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT TO CARRY FORWARD WITH BOLIVIA'S
JULY 9 ELECTION PLAN. SO FAR INDICATIONS PERSIST THAT
PRESIDENT BANZER WILL PUSH FOR POSTPONEMENT OF ELECTIONS.
BANZER CONTINUED TO SET THE SCENE OVER THE WEEKEND IN REMARKS
TO THE PRESS THAT THE ELECTORAL PROCESS MIGHT HAVE TO
BE "MODIFIED" BECAUSE OF GROWING PUBLIC CONCERN OVER THOSE
TRYING TO DISCREDIT THE PROCESS, PROBELMS WITH CHILE, ETC.
THE POLITICAL OPPOSITION REACTED TO POSSIBLE POSTPONEMENT
OF ELECTIONS WITH A STATEMENT SIGNED BY FORMER PRESIDENTS HERNAN
SILES ZUAZO, LUIS ADOLFO SILES SALINAS, THE SPOKESMAN
FOR THE VICTOR PAZ-WING OF THE MNR, THE MILITARY
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DISSIDENT GROUP TOPATER AND OTHERS, CALLING FOR BANZER'S
RESIGNATION AND FORMATION OF A TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT UNTIL
ELECTIONS ARE HELD. THE AMBASSADORS' OF VENEZUELA, GREAT
BRITAIN, WEST GERMANY AND THE US, SPEAKING AT THE WORLD BANK
CONSULTATIVE GROUP MEETING APRIL 3, EXPRESSED THEIR
GOVERNMENT'S STRONG SUPPORT (ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL) FOR
DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT IN BOLIVIA. WHETHER BANZER WILL

WAIVER FROM HIS APPARENT PLAN TO POSTPONE ELECTIONS REMAINS
UNCLEAR. END SUMMARY.

2. AGAINST A BACKGROUND OF MOUNTING SPECULATION, ON APRIL 1
PRESIDENT BANZER BEGAN TO MEET WITH ABOUT 100 OF BOLIVIA'S SMALL
AND LARGE UNIT MILITARY COMMANDERS TO DETERMINE, AMONG OTHER ISSUES,
WHETHER THERE SHOULD BE ANY CHANGE IN THE ELECTORAL SCHEME, WHICH
HE SET IN MOTION LAST NOVEMBER 9. CONTRIBUTING TO THE NOW
WIDESPREAD BELIEF THAT THE JULY 9 ELECTION DATE MIGHT BE
POSTPONED WERE BANZER'S REMARKS AT A BRIEF PRESS CONFERENCE
IN COCHABAMBA ON MARCH 31. IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS, BANZER
CONFIRMED THAT THERE WAS CONCERN IN GOVERNMENT CIRCLES OVER
THE "PERSONALIST ATTITUDES" OF THOSE WHO SEEMED INTENT ON
DISCREDITING THE ELECTORAL PROCESS BY PLAYING ON THE BREAKDOWN
OF THE SEA OUTLET NEGOTIATIONS WITH CHILE. NOTING GROWING
PUBLIC PREOCCUPATION WITH THE COUNTRY'S FUTURE UNDER THE
CURRENT SCHEME, BANZER SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT MIGHT HAVE
TO "MODIFY" THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IF THE PEOPLE'S
RESERVATIONS ABOUT IT BECAME "GENERALIZED." BANZER ALSO
COMMENTED THAT IF BOLIVIA WERE NOT ABLE TO OBTAIN A SEA
OUTLET FROM CHILE THROUGH DIPLOMATIC MEANS, IT MIGHT ONE
DAY HAVE TO GO TO WAR.

3. LATER THAT SAME DAY, BANZER PRESIDED OVER A CIVIC RALLY
IN SANTA CRUZ THAT WAS CONVENED TO SUPPORT HIS GOVERNMENT'S
DECISION TO BREAK RELATIONS WITH CHILE. ON THIS OCCASION,
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HE DID NOT ENGAGE IN SABRE RATTLING, BUT CALLED INSTEAD
ON THE UNITED NATIONS, THE OAS, INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS,
AND "ALL COUNTRIES THAT STILL BELIEVE IN JUSTICE" TO HELP
BOLIVIA FIND A SOLUTION TO ITS GEOGRAPHIC ENCLOSURE. AT THE
RALLY--AT WHICH BANZER MADE NO REFERENCE AT ALL TO THE
ELECTORAL PROCESS--SOME DEMONSTRATORS CARRIED PLACARDS
DEMANDING POSTPONEMENT OF ELECTIONS UNTIL 1980.

4. MEANWHILE PRO-ELECTION FORCES BEGAN TO VOCALIZE THEIR
CONCERN ABOUT THE POSSIBLE POSTPONEMENT OF ELECTIONS.
IDENTIFYING THEMSELVES WITH DEMANDS THAT BANZER RESIGN
FROM THE PRESIDENCY, NINE OPPOSITION LEADERS (INCLUDING FORMER
PRESIDENTS SILES ZUAZO AND SILES SALINAS, MNR PAZ ESTENSSORISTA
WING CHIEF JUAREQUI GUACHALLA, PRA LEADER GUEVARA ARCE AND
TOPATER SIGNATORY PATINO AYAROA) SIGNED A PUBLIC APPEAL FOR A
"NATIONAL CRUSADE" TO PERSUADE THE ARMED FORCES TO CREATE A
"TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT" TO RUN THE COUNTRY UNTIL ELECTIONS.
THE OPPOSITION DOCUMENT CHARACTERIZED BANZER'S COCHABAMBA
REMARKS AS "MANEUVER AND MANIPULATION" TO DETAIN THE
CONSTITUTIONALIZATION PROCESS, AND CAME OUT STRONGLY
AGAINST HIS CONTINUATION IN POWER BY POSTPONEMENT OF THE
ELECTIONS, SUPPORT FOR AN "OFFICIAL" CANDIDATE, OR MAINTENANCE

OF REAL POWER AS COMMANDER IN CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES.
IT ALSO CRITICIZED BANZER FOR HIS "IRRESPONSIBLE MANAGEMENT"
OF BOLIVIA'S FOREIGN POLICY (AN OBVIOUS REFERENCE TO HIS SEA
OUTLET DIPLOMACY).

5. AT THE FIRST SESSION OF THE WORLD BANK CONSULTATIVE
MEETING ON BOLIVIA, THE MORNING OF APRIL 3, THE AMBASSADOR
OUTLINED THE USG PROGRAMS BEING PLANNED (PL 480 TITLE III,
INCREASED AID, RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF OPIC ACTIVITIES, ETC.)
WHICH WOULD SUPPORT DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT IN BOLIVIA,
STRONGLY IMPLYING THAT US SUPPORT WOULD BE MUCH LESS IF
ELECTIONS DO NOT OCCUR. VENEZUELA'S AMBASSADOR ALSO SPOKE
FORCEFULLY OF THE BENEFITS OF DEMOCRACY AND STATED THAT
FAILURE TO HOLD ELECTIONS WOULD DIRECTLY AFFECT VENEZUELA'S
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BILATERAL ECONOMIC AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO BOLIVIA.
THE BRITISH AND FRG AMBASSADORS REPEATED THE SAME THEME
IN SOMEWHAT Milder FORM.

6. COMMENT: SO FAR WE HAVE SEEN NO EVIDENCE THAT BANZER
IS WAIVERING FROM WHAT WE BELIEVE TO BE HIS PLAN TO PERSUADE
THE MILITARY TO AGREE TO POSTPONE THE JULY ELECTIONS. A USUALLY
RELIABLE SOURCE ADVISED EMBASSY OFFICERS THAT A DELEGATION FROM
MILITARY HEADQUARTERS IN LA PAZ DEPARTED MORNING OF APRIL 1
TO VISIT MAJOR MILITARY INSTALLATIONS TO OBTAIN SIGNATURES
ON A PETITION CALLING FOR ELECTION POSTPONEMENT. AMBASSADOR
PLANS TO MEET WITH ARMY COMMANDER VILLALPANDO MORNING OF
APRIL 4 TO CONVEY US SUPPORT FOR ELECTIONS ALONG SAME LINES
AS GIVEN TO PRESIDENT BANZER ON MARCH 30, 1978.
BOEKER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ARMED FORCES, MEETINGS, ELECTIONS, ELECTION CANCELLATION, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 03 apr 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978LAPAZ02674
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780144-0130
Format: TEL
From: LA PAZ
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t197804100/aaaadgxl.tel
Line Count: 151
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: d348b2a5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 LA PAZ 2606
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 07 jul 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2816865
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: BOLIVIAN MILITARY PONDERES WHETHER TO PROCEED WITH JULY ELECTIONS
TAGS: PINT, BL
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/d348b2a5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014